Phip Murray

Talking Points

A Snapshot of Contemporary Visual Arts 2013-14

> **Independent Research Report**

Commissioned by the Australia Council for the Arts

Contents

Foreword

Increased artistic vibrancy in the sector and the high caliber of work being produced and presented by our artists and curators is reflected in the increased levels of audience engagement and our international profile.

It is exciting to be at such a significant juncture in Australia's cultural life and the most transformative time in the Australia Council's 40 year history. Since the 2003 announcement of the Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy we have seen a significant shift in the vitality and sustainability of Australia's contemporary visual arts sector. Increased artistic vibrancy in the sector and the high caliber of work being produced and presented by our artists and curators is reflected in the increased levels of audience engagement and our international profile. Australia Council data collected from organisations shows that the overall audience for contemporary art has grown by 25% since 2002, with 5.7 million Australians attending an exhibition, workshop or school activity presented by a visual arts organisation.

There is much to be celebrated in the visual arts sector from a rise in attendances at galleries and arts events, to increased private sector support and growing international collaboration and recognition. This independent research is part of our growing research program to support and benefit the sector and inform the work of the Council as we respond to a dynamic arts environment. I also hope *Talking Points* will be a valuable tool for the sector, providing a snapshot informed by the expertise and experience of the visual arts community themselves.

I would like to thank Phip Murray for her work and acknowledge the people who gave their time to speak with Phip and contribute to the research – the makers, buyers, presenters, curators and philanthropists who make up Australia's vibrant visual arts sector.

Tony Grybowski, CEO
Australia Council for the Arts

Foreword

The world in 2014 is also a different place, with new challenges and opportunities. Artists and arts organisations are required to navigate and shape shift through a complex set of structures, relationships, and arrangements that are both global and local, in order to create or present their best work.

Australia's visual arts sector is a vibrant and diverse ecology. From Indigenous arts centres in the Western Desert and other remote parts of Australia's vast geography, to artist run initiatives colonising disused spaces in the metropolitan centres; from major, internationally renowned museums to festivals taking visual arts outside its normal parameters of engagement; and galleries both public and commercial showing contemporary visual arts and craft, supporting artists to make ambitious new work.

There is much to be applauded and celebrated in the visual arts: more opportunities for artists to create and show new work; a huge rise in audiences for contemporary visual arts; strong public / private partnerships including a rise in philanthropy, which has made a significant contribution to helping to realise ambition in the sector; more international connectivity, including Australian artists being showcased at major events, and deeper engagements with Asia. All this hard work must not stagnate.

The world in 2014 is also a different place, with new challenges and opportunities. Artists and arts organisations are required to navigate and shape shift through a complex set of structures, relationships, and arrangements that are both global and local, in order to create or present their best work. This is an exciting new contemporary visual arts global cartography, filled with promise. It will require skilful negotiators and mediators.

In my experience, great results come from collaboration and Talking Points is a distillation of interviews with artists, producers and curators, museum and gallery directors, commercial gallery directors, board members, collectors and patrons of cotntemporary visual arts. It has been a great pleasure to watch the story unfold and a privilege to have access to the thoughts and opinions of Australia's most dynamic, committed artists, arts professionals, collectors and patrons who are passionate about contemporary visual arts, and care about the future.

Julie Lomax
Director, Visual Arts

Executive Summary

‘Being an artist is a great privilege. It allows you to express yourself in ways that are usually impossible in normal daily life, and it allows you to work with bright and dedicated people who are committed to improving themselves and the world around them.’

Philip Samartzis Artist and Artistic Director, Liquid Architecture Festival of Sound Arts

About this report

This report is a profile of the contemporary visual arts sector based on extensive interviews with stakeholders. It is not intended as a comprehensive analysis of Australian contemporary art; rather, it aims to give a snapshot of the overall sector, mapping key developments over the past decade and exploring current challenges and opportunities.

The Australia Council for the Arts commissioned Phip Murray to undertake the research independently. She was supported by Research Assistant Kelly Fliedner. The Australia Council is using this report to understand the visual arts sector and to inform thinking as the Australia Council develops a new strategic plan.

The research comprised in-depth interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders. We interviewed those who make, present, buy and sell contemporary visual art in Australia. Seventy-two people participated in face-to-face interviews and 21 contributed text-based submissions. Quotes from contributors to these interviews are highlighted throughout the report. The research methodology and a list of interview participants are included at the end of this report.

Alongside this qualitative research, the Australia Council also produced *Artfacts: Visual Arts,* a statistical overview of the visual arts in Australia compiled from existing research and quantitative data.

Key findings

The findings form five chapters: Chapter 1 gives an overview of the different spheres of activity that comprise Australian contemporary visual art; Chapter 2 examines contemporary art infrastructure; Chapter 3 focuses on artists; Chapter 4 reviews Australian contemporary art within the international context; and Chapter 5 explores audiences and their engagement with contemporary visual arts.

1. The contemporary visual art sector is increasingly variegated

The Australian contemporary visual art sector has grown in depth and complexity to become a variegated structure, made up of multiple spheres of activity. Growth has been steady over a few decades and the past decade has seen determined growth. New large-scale initiatives are raising the profile of contemporary art, and the small to medium sector is full of lively activity across commercial galleries, contemporary art spaces, design centres, artist-led projects, university galleries, Indigenous art centres, public and regional galleries, and other ‘post institutional’ collectives.

Executive Summary

2. Sustainability of infrastructure is an ongoing concern

Despite this growth, parts of the sector are currently under considerable pressure, particularly after the global financial crisis. Some commercial galleries and Indigenous art centres, for example, had to recalibrate for softer market conditions, and some contemporary art spaces are struggling to meet increasing overheads with stagnant or decreasing budgets. Managing sustainability is an urgent matter, especially for the small to medium sector, which often feels the challenges most intensely. Across the sector, protagonists have different ideas about strategies to address these infrastructure challenges. The best model for investment in contemporary visual art provoked much debate.

3. New players and new models need to be supported

Many spoke of the need to strike the right balance between supporting the existing infrastructure and enabling new protagonists in contemporary art. Contemporary art is a dynamic sector, with new players often entering the scene. The last decade has seen a proliferation of interdisciplinary, participatory and live art artists, as well as new hybrid creative practitioners who borrow from art and design. The system needs to be flexible to support these new players and new models. However, some argued that contemporary art infrastructure is still too aligned with the museum model and not keeping pace with the leading edge of practice. Others expressed interest at the way some institutions are changing and opening up to support broader contemporary art practices.

4. The increase in private sector support for contemporary art

The last decade has seen an increase in private sector support for the arts, including ambitious new private initiatives such as Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) and growth in arts philanthropy from large scale examples such as the Mordant's $15 million contribution to the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) to grassroots crowd funding activity. While the increase in private sector support is fuelling great initiatives, the changed dynamic between public and private sectors is also creating some challenges. Arts workers felt it crucial that the considerable organisational costs required to generate private income not be overlooked, and another strong message was that the private sector should augment – not replace – government funding of the arts.

5. The emergence of career pathways for artists

The research found an increasingly diverse range of career options available to artists. Artists navigate their profession in diverse ways, often inventing their career for themselves. In contrast to this diversification, a subject that attracted much comment was a perceived attempt to standardize artists' careers over the last decade. Many commented on the emergence of a career model for artists, which suggests that artists start out as young and emerging, pass through mid-career and move to established. Artists said that in reality their careers are not linear, and there was concern that this model promotes unrealistic expectations for new artists. Participants also felt that there was an increased emphasis on marketing. This drew cynicism from some who felt that the system was starting to skew the focus from art-making to promotion.

‘We are at a moment of turning contemporary art into history. We should take that very seriously. It should be a huge part of all Australian art museums.’

Professor Charles Green Artist and Reader in Contemporary International and Australian Art, The University of Melbourne

6. ‘Mid-career’ is a challenging time for Australian artists

Strong feedback from the sector was that Australia prioritises and potentially over-invests in the ‘young and emerging’ demographic. While participants agreed that support is important for this category, many cautioned that the focus should be on new ideas, not new generations. The mid-career artist was thought to be currently under-supported in Australia and one of the clearest messages emanating from the sector is that they require and deserve more support. Participants regretted that some of Australia’s most highly regarded artists are not able to continue to properly develop their careers. This was also seen as lost capacity for Australia.

7. Increasing the visibility of Australian contemporary art in the international context

With contemporary art becoming an increasingly global phenomenon, the visibility of Australian art within international art markets ranked highly as a concern. Engaging in international markets begs questions around how to articulate Australian practice to a global audience. Such questions are not new, but they are recalibrating in response to changing global dynamics. New opportunities are emerging and many participants argued that the contemporary art sector needs to operate in a pluralistic manner, building dialogues across the globe. Strong peer-to-peer international connections was nominated as the key strategy among a range of options for enabling international opportunities. Discussions about international engagement also often provoked thinking around the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous art in Australia. Many felt that an insistent and exciting priority for Australian art is to more fully explore the relationships between these worlds.

8. Supporting different models for audience engagement

The ‘spectacularisation’ of contemporary art has gathered speed over the last decade, manifesting in blockbuster exhibitions, spectacle architecture and big events such as arts fairs, festivals and biennials. These initiatives stimulate popular interest and can deliver a ‘wow factor’ that is broadly enjoyed. However contemporary art professionals also advocated for the more challenging protagonists within contemporary art who are unlikely to gain popular appeal. The subject of how audiences engage with art drew much interest. Many argued that there is currently too much emphasis on popular appeal and that a spectrum of possibilities for engaging with art is crucial. Some institutions are well placed to inspire large crowds; others should support unorthodox practices and niche audiences. Many commented on the expansion of the audience for contemporary art over the last decade. Further growth is forecast, as is demand for deeper critical engagement, which could be met with increased education and public programming, augmenting audience experiences through online initiatives, and fostering excellent art writing and publishing.

Research Findings

Emily Ferretti

› Berlinde de Bruyckere at Art Gallery of South Australia

‘Artistic projects happen where they need to, use what they must and generally ask: where am I, you and we in all this?’

Jason Maling Artist

1. A profile of contemporary art in Australia

Some recent examples of contemporary art in Australia

A collaboration between an experimental sound artist and the communities of Djarindjin, Lombadinia and One Arm Point in Western Australia’s remote Dampier Peninsula; a street art opening in an artist-run initiative operating out of some ‘spare’ space in a Sydney City Council multistorey car park; a mutated taxidermy horse by contemporary Belgian artist Berlinde De Bruyckere (pictured) juxtaposed with medieval renditions of Christ on the Cross; an immersive live art project with participants dressed in tailcoat, white gloves and headphones wandering about the usually secretive environs of a Masonic Temple; a work by Louise Bourgeois installed in the bathroom of a private house, with a commissioned Australian artwork by Rob McLeish in the lounge room made in response to the Bourgeois piece.[1] All these are recent examples of art practice in Australia and they illustrate the diversity of where, how and by whom contemporary art happens.

Art is no longer an easily recognisable and codified set of principles and practices: it has expanded and shape-shifted and become an innumerable series of practices. Hallmarks that signalled ‘art’ are continually questioned. For instance, while the institution in all its variations remains significant, the ubiquity of the white cube as the dominant model for the presentation of art has been changed by the proliferation of public artworks and site specific projects. The canvases collectively authored by Indigenous artists and the relational practices of live art challenge notions of authorship and any remnants of a belief in art as the creation of an individual genius. The increasingly interdisciplinary nature of creative practice requires definitions for new hybrids of artist/designer, artist/performer and curator/artist. In Australia there is also a tendency for everybody to be everything and all at once – artists are curators are writers are lecturers are members of collectives are part-time installers for big institutions and so on.

[1] Philip Samartzis’ sound art project created in collaboration with Tura New Music and the communities of One Arm Point, Djarindjin and Lombadina as part of IASKA’s *Spaced: art out of place* program, 2010; group show of street art at Sydney’s Alaska Projects artist-run initiative, 2013; Belgian artist Berlinde De Bruyckere’s *We are all flesh,* newly acquired and hung within the Art Gallery of South Australia’s revitalized Melrose Wing of European Art, 2013; Jason Maling’s *fuguestate* created in collaboration with composer Joseph Giovinazzo and set in the United Masonic Centre, Melbourne, 2012; an exhibition at db project, a space curated by and run from the home of Mark Feary and Chris Hanrahan in Surry Hills, Sydney.

The diverse Australian arts sector

'I think that contemporary art is much stronger than it was 15 or 30 years ago, and there is a greater variegation in the sector too.' Many of the participants agreed with this assessment by Juliana Engberg, Artistic Director of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA). They hoped that this growth will continue and that it will mitigate difficulties, particularly for the many artists who are not able to earn a livelihood locally.

Large scale

Many respondents felt invigorated by the creation of a series of dedicated and ambitious large-scale public institutions for contemporary art over the past 10 years, particularly the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) and the refurbished Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA). These flagship organisations were described as vital cultural lighthouses giving contemporary art high visibility among the broader Australian public and also satisfying the desire for the big experience. Their complementary contributions to contemporary art were also nominated as crucial, with the ACCA's status as a commissioning organisation and the MCA's as a collecting institution. Many participants commented on the increasing number of big events – festivals, art fairs, bienniales and triennials – which stimulate enthusiasm for contemporary art (although some expressed concern that they skew expectations for viewing contemporary art towards the spectacular). A number of respondents commented on the absence of a flagship national institution dedicated to Indigenous art and run by Indigenous people.

Participants were somewhat polarised on the responsibility of large-scale museums such as the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) to present contemporary art. Some said that an historical orientation is appropriate for these organisations

'We juxtapose contemporary art with historical works to demonstrate that art is a continuum – contemporary art is nothing radically different.'

Nick Mitzevich Director, Art Gallery of South Australia

and presenting contemporary art is unproductive duplication. Others believed that these museums have an obligation to present and collect the work of living Australian artists. They argued that national collections obtaining key contemporary works is vital and they thought the large audiences attending these venues provide an opportunity to profile the work of living Australian artists and to build audiences for contemporary art. A number of respondents thought that the division between historical art and contemporary art was unfortunate. They regarded the chance to consider the work of a contemporary artist as part of the historical trajectory an important opportunity for critical engagement.

Contemporary art spaces

The small to medium sector of the Australian art ecology is populated with interesting protagonists. The network of contemporary art spaces that grew out of experimental art practices in the 1970s in each capital city is particularly important. Spaces such as Gertrude Contemporary in Melbourne, Artspace in Sydney and the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane are significant drivers of the new in contemporary practice. Similarly, spaces such as Adelaide's JamFactory and Sydney's Object Gallery incubate innovations across craft and design. These spaces work in a critically engaged and curatorially focused manner, offering strong frameworks for artists and audiences. Following a recommendation in the *Myer Report,*[2] there has been increased investment

[2] *Report of the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002) referred to subsequently as the *Myer Report* after its Chair Rupert Myer.

in this tier over the past 10 years, and many participants commented on the resulting dividends. This investment enabled organisations to be more curatorially ambitious and to provide greater support for artists as well as building capacity around communications, education and public programs.

This middle sector still faces real challenges, with a number of key spaces experiencing increased pressure from rents that have dramatically increased over the past decade. Notable examples include Melbourne's Gertrude Contemporary and the Centre for Contemporary Photography. The importance of these spaces for contemporary art in Australia is recognised across the sector. However, they run on relatively small budgets and many are currently experiencing significant sustainability issues.

Public and regional galleries, and university galleries

The capacity and diversity of this middle tier is extended by the network of public and regional galleries and university galleries. To some, they are untapped resources.

Australia is crisscrossed with a robust network of regional and public galleries. Regional galleries often provide well-supported opportunities for artists as well as access to new audiences. Certain regional galleries, such as Gippsland Art Gallery and Newcastle Art Gallery for instance, have pursued a keen interest in presenting and collecting contemporary art, often working in close collaboration with contemporary artists on ambitious outcomes. They can also offer interesting contexts for artists: Angelica Mesiti, for instance, developed a video artwork with assistance from Broken Hill Art Exchange that responded to local history, which Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery subsequently presented. Some participants believed that regional centres are sometimes overlooked for their ability to extend the base for contemporary art and to enable artists significant developmental opportunities.

The university sector also offers opportunities for developing ambitious contemporary art projects, both through their networks of galleries and the depth of research capacity across universities more broadly. Many participants working in public institutions spoke of a need for longer research projects and saw the potential for the university sector to be involved. Overseas examples of innovative multi-year collaborative ventures between universities and public institutions were cited, such as One Day Sculpture, an initiative between Massey University, the University of the West of England, and art institutions across New Zealand. Universities are large organisations and their international networks, research capabilities and access to resources (including research funding and substantial infrastructure) could fuel ventures. These capabilities are often augmented by ambitious university galleries, such as the Victorian College of the Arts' Margaret Lawrence Gallery, which has a strong reputation for fostering innovative art practices, or Monash University's Museum of Modern Art, a substantial new architect-designed building that reopened in 2010.

Artist-led practices

Across Australia there is a diversity of artist-led projects and artist-run spaces. Some, like Platform, West Space and Firstdraft, have existed for more than 20 years, while others pop up and down within a few months or years as energies rise and subside or opportunities come and go. Artists are often drawn to artist-led projects because they offer the space for experimentation, the opportunity to sharpen critical and professional skills, and support for all forms of art practice and artists of all ages and stages. There is a wide variety of artist-led projects, such as those clustered around spaces, projects or magazines. Participants identified a common perception among policy makers that artists are involved in these initiatives as stepping stones towards a more lucrative career. However, many artists continue to be involved with artist-led projects throughout their careers, and participants expressed frustration at policies that conflate artist-led practice with 'young and emerging'.

› Sean Gladwell at ACMI

‘Ocular Lab started with a very rigorous and serious group of artists who were not about a fashion, or a particular age or generation. It was very much about cross-generational practice.’

Raafat Ishak Artist

The dominant model for the artist-run gallery in Australia is where artists pay rental fees for their exhibition space. Many aspire to change this to a model more supportive of artists, but securing funding or access to space to enable this is challenging. It is also a model that is becoming unsustainable as property prices and rents increase in urban centres. Melbourne has long been recognised for its lively communities of artist-led spaces and projects, but the city is now ranked the fourth most expensive in the world (and Sydney ranked third), so it seems inevitable that artists will be priced out of central locations. In response, initiatives such as Renew Australia or the City of Melbourne’s Creative Spaces project are attempting to work with government and business to leverage free or low-cost space for artists. These are innovative models for arts advocacy, highlighting the importance of lateral resourcing. Support for the arts is not always about direct funding, and access to space (or other resources) can be a powerful mobiliser of contemporary art initiatives.

Such initiatives are also evidence of the strong outcomes possible when government, business and the arts collaborate to mutual benefit. Many participants hoped that future advocacy for the arts may extend to increased access to buildings and infrastructure as well as direct funding. While projects like Creative Spaces often provide short-term leases prior to development or gentrification, long-term options usually require state government involvement. The Victorian government’s redevelopment of the Collingwood TAFE site, which looks as though it might provide well positioned, long-term and affordable housing for a series of contemporary art spaces, is an example of a real outcome for contemporary art.

Indigenous art centres

The network of Indigenous art centres across Australia that has proliferated since the 1970s is vital infrastructure supporting communities of artists. An early precursor was Papunya Tula Artists, established in 1972, which represents artists primarily from the Pintupi and Luritja language groups. More recent examples include Warakurna Artists, established in 2005 and situated in Warakurna, a remote community of 180 people in the Ngaanyatjarra lands of Western Australia. Both organisations are entirely owned and governed by Indigenous people.

As well as enabling some of Australia’s most innovative artistic traditions, some of these centres are founded on a ‘whole community’ approach. Warakurna Art Centre delivers an extraordinary breadth of community services, including youth programs, cultural engagement, outreach services to remote areas, financial planning, and aged care respite – all of which

‘They’re about saving a way of life *and* about saving lives. That gives you an indication of the importance of art centres.’

Hetti Perkins Curator and writer

are largely funded through artwork sales. A number of Indigenous art centres became vulnerable due to a softening in the market following the global financial crisis and, some argue, because of broader political and social issues. While there are strong art centre networks in some parts of the country, other areas of Australia have gaps or missing links. Outside the rural and remote art centre model there are Indigenous collectives within an urban context, such as Boomali Aboriginal Artists’ Cooperative, which started in Sydney in 1987, and proppaNOW, which began in Brisbane in 2003.

The Indigenous Art Code was launched in 2009, aiming to ensure fair trade with Indigenous artists and to benchmark ethical standards in a previously unregulated and often vulnerable market. The reluctance of some galleries to sign the code is prompting calls for mandatory signing.

Commercial galleries

Australia has a rich history of collecting and a strong network of commercial galleries. Gallerists such as Roslyn Oxley and Anna Schwartz have celebrated their 30 year anniversaries, and in the past decade there has been further expansion in this sector, including new ‘third way’ models such as OK Gallery, a hybrid model of artist-run gallery and commercial space. Many participants commented on the changing dynamic between the commercial galleries and the public sector. Where once there was sometimes reticence to work together, there is now a more collaborative outlook.

Many Australian artists rely on a strong commercial sector. While respondents celebrated the maturing of the contemporary art market, there was still concern about the Australian market’s capacity to support artists. Australia’s wealth is not necessarily translating into a buoyant art market. There was no consensus on this: some thought traditions of art collecting are still burgeoning in Australia, while others believed that in this highly globalised and digitised art market many collectors are buying from overseas more frequently (especially in the case of the ‘art fair junkie’). Commercial art markets are a relatively unregulated sector, which makes it hard to track buying trends.[3] The global financial crisis had an impact on the sector, contributing to a swathe of commercial gallery closures across the country between 2008 and 2012. Many gallerists commented on the difficulties of that time.

Many respondents expressed concern about the absence of a secondary market for some contemporary Australian art. While the auction houses have had robust sales of contemporary Indigenous art and Australian ‘modern masters’ (such as Fred Williams and Charles Blackman), other areas of contemporary art are under-represented in this system. Many in this sector thought that Australian artists are being unfairly penalised compared to their international counterparts, who are properly valued in the secondary market.

Respondents in the commercial sector criticised a number of recent legislative changes. Participants regretted the decision to disqualify art from superannuation funds and many wished for the reinstatement of tax concessions to stimulate growth (such as a tax break that encourages small businesses to buy art). They praised the National Cultural Gifts program,

[3] The Australia Council has indicated that improved data collection in this area would help with market analysis.

which gives a tax incentive for the donation of works to public institutions, both for its support for artists and its ability to fill national collections with significant work. The Resale Royalty Scheme, which gives five percent of the sale price back to artists on the resale of their work, is controversial. Some believed it is an important protector of artists' rights, with many of its advocates in the Indigenous art market where secondary markets are strong and resale prices often much higher than original sale prices. However, the scheme was not popular in the context of non-Indigenous commercial markets, and was seen as another disincentive for contemporary art buyers.

Private museums

A museum dedicated to sex and death; an edifice to modernism surrounded by a vineyard; a church hall housing new contemporary art commissions. This cursory list of MONA, TarraWarra Museum of Art and Detached gives a sense of the strong and idiosyncratic personalities of some of Australia's new private initiatives. It's difficult to imagine a government signing off on a cheque for an art collection on sex and death. MONA illustrates the freedom of not being accountable for public funding.

Many of the participants were excited by the number of privately funded projects and museums over the past decade. MONA in Tasmania is a high-profile example, but there have been a host of others, such as White Rabbit Gallery (NSW), Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (NSW), Detached (Tas), Lyon Housemuseum (Vic) and TarraWarra Museum of Art (Vic). Many thought it surprising that there are not more private commissioning bodies in the model of Kaldor Art Projects, which for more than 30 years has mounted ambitious contemporary art projects, frequently working in partnership with a major institution as a presenting organisation. The respondents enjoyed these new and often maverick voices in the arts scene. They appreciated the founder's generosity, the opportunities for artists and audiences, and the dividends for local business and communities – for instance, since its opening in 2011 MONA has attracted over 700,000 visitors to a state with a population of 500,000.

The rise and rise of the curator and the independent

Over the past few decades the curator has become a key figure in contemporary art. Beginning in the 1960s with precursors such as Harald Szeeman (who came to Australia to work with Kaldor Art Projects in 1971), the curatorial profession has grown quickly. Masters degrees have sprung up across the country ('Where will they go?' one participant asked; 'not everybody can be a hot curator'), and the curator has taken on an increasingly significant role in the interface between artist and audience.

Many of those interviewed were pleased to see that freelance endeavours are becoming an option, assisted by more flexibility in the system. Independent writers, curators and producers are more visible. It was previously thought to be impossible to maintain a practice as an independent curator in Australia, but now there are burgeoning examples of it, with some seemingly able to work across multiple institutions in both the public and private sectors.

› Warakurna Artists and Tjarlirli Arts

‘I would like to see a master plan. What other industry would allow itself to be organised around such a random set of principles?’

Juliana Engberg Artistic Director, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art and Artistic Director, 19th Biennale of Sydney

2. Dynamism and sustainability

Managing tensions in the arts sector

Participants commented on how dynamic the arts sector is overall. The positive side to this is ongoing renewal and a sense of vitality. It becomes problematic, however, when it flips into insecurity. Many organisations are trying to manage rising costs with decreasing budgets.

Issues around sustainability rated highly as topics of concern, particularly in the context of high rents, the global financial crisis and limited (or no) increases in government funding.[4] Some organisations are especially vulnerable when tightened budgets combine with housing insecurity. Some respondents also expressed concern about arts workers’ low remuneration. While arts workers’ wages can be a fraught topic when artists are often unpaid, in the small to medium sector in particular, salaries are often not commensurate with experience and highly qualified senior staff are sometimes earning less than the average weekly wage.

A master plan for contemporary art?

Some organisations currently receive government funding, which is distributed through competitive and peer-assessed annual or multi-year grant rounds. Each organisation augments this with private sector funding and other earned income. The health of each organisation is a dynamic equation, impacted by local factors such as the level of state government support for the arts, access to accommodation, ability to earn income, the robustness of local philanthropy and so on. At present, some organisations struggle with financial sustainability, and this is particularly so in the middle tier.

Across the sector, participants had different ideas about the best way to invest in infrastructure to fuel innovative contemporary art. Some argued that the current system perpetuates a situation where organisations are funded to fail. They said that the money might be better spent funding fewer organisations to succeed. Some believed there

[4] *An exception to this trend was the increase in funding for the Australia Council in 2013, largely to support ‘unfunded excellence’.*

is too much duplication in the sector, and cited multiple organisations presenting similar programs and artists. With limited funding and audiences, they said there is no room for this duplication. Some participants thought that certain aspects of contemporary arts infrastructure should be evaluated to find out what is most relevant now. Priorities from a decade ago may have changed, and this could change how resources are targeted.

Some participants argued that these accumulated factors represent a lack of strategic vision for contemporary art, which disadvantages the whole sector. To correct this, some supported a master plan, which organises the sector and articulates a whole-of-sector understanding of who is doing what and why. In this system, duplication is not encouraged. Organisations are funded to develop their particular specialty within an overall but variegated system. Some argued strongly for such master planning, while others argued against it, because they were philosophically orientated towards a free-form and self-managed sector, rather than a directorial hand. Many also disagreed with the 'too much duplication' argument believing that, under closer inspection, organisations are subtly different and that this nuance should be supported to increase the depth of the Australian art sector.

'Organisations are doing more and more but doing it less well. It's become a game. People have been rewarded for that mentality but it is bad for the sector.'

Simon Maidment Director, Satellite Art Projects

Artists or infrastructure?

Another hot topic was the relative merits of investment in organisational infrastructure versus money paid directly to the artist. Some said that artists too often come last in the equation and there is a surfeit of arts bureaucracy. 'I do feel that artists seem to get lost in the picture,' one participant said. 'That is one thing that I would put at the top of everything – artists must be first, not all the business about audiences and infrastructures and communications and so on.' While the principle of paying artists was roundly supported, respondents also believed that this priority must be carefully balanced against the opportunities enabled through infrastructure. 'Artists need advocacy,' stated another participant. 'Do people imagine that if you give someone $80,000 to do their project but they've got nowhere to present it, no-one to promote it, no-one to show it to colleagues who are coming through from elsewhere, and so on, their career will grow?'

Large vs small

A topic that generated interest was the benefit of funding large institutions versus small to medium organisations. In general, the arts sector has a remarkably collegiate orientation. Participants recognised the relative merits of organisations of all sizes across the tiers. Nevertheless, the research evidenced a sense that the small to medium sector is particularly vulnerable and that additional resourcing in this area is likely to have a disproportionately advantageous effect. The arts sector generates a lot of capacity for relatively little spend in the small to medium tier and a modicum of further investment could fuel ambition. An additional imperative is that small to medium organisations provide ways to directly support Australian artists (which is not the aim of some museums). Some firmly believed that the priority for arts funding should be to support living artists responding to Australian culture now.

End the ‘new new new’ and ‘more more more’ ethos

Participants often commented on the need to strengthen foundations and consolidate programs and services in organisations. Arts workers spoke of the pressure to continually expand programs, driven by a perceived requirement to seem new, exciting and ambitious to funders or to fit in with new government priorities such as ‘young and emerging’. Many believed that proposals based on covering core costs or consolidating existing programs did not compete with the promise of a whole new program. They saw this as a false economy. A strong message coming through the sector was a desire to consolidate programming and focus on depth of engagement rather than endless and, some argued, senseless expansion. Some administrators said this re-orientation may set them at odds with government imperatives, which send out a (perhaps implicit) message of rewarding growth over consolidation. Many believed that some agencies place too much emphasis on quantitative data and numbers (more money raised, more audiences through, more artists serviced, more public programs). They saw a need to mature into a more complex regime, in which there are nuanced methods for judging success. Participants spoke about the dangers of judging everyone using the same criteria. They believed that not all acquittal templates should be identical. Organisations should be rewarded for meeting their goals and these goals must differ across the sector.

› Masahiro Asaka

‘We made a strong decision to stop programming via funding opportunities. It can be an issue when the policy imperatives of funding agencies start to weigh heavily on artistic thinking.’

Blair French Executive Director, Artspace

Beware the funding carrot

Many arts workers spoke of the problem of ‘funding carrots’ where applicants devise projects or mold existing projects in order to obtain funding. Everyone acknowledged that when applying through a competitive funding process, they often cast their project in a certain light to make it closely align with criteria. However, when new programs or artworks are devised with the sole aim of getting funding, the balance swings towards opportunism. Some participants said their organisations refuse to program on the basis of funding opportunities, while others did not think such a decision was possible for them. In some instances the need for funding led to respondents devising projects to fit the criteria and then undertaking ‘creative accountancy’ to put the funds towards their core costs. Many argued that this predicament could be helped by funding agencies making the criteria less restrictive and by remaining more responsive to the sector’s needs. Arts workers were often critical of government funding initiatives that they believed periodically ‘pop up out of the blue’. They saw this as an inefficient use of funds and also evidence of the government exerting too heavy a hand on the sector. They thought the money would be better spent working in partnership with the sector to build on existing capacity.

Funding agencies

Many participants acknowledged the authority that funding agencies hold in the sector. In deciding what grant lines are available and managing the administration of grants, funding bodies have considerable influence over what art is created and presented. How funding bodies mitigate this influence is a real concern in the sector. Participants thought the principle of peer assessment crucial, as is keeping grant criteria relatively open so that it can be responsive to the sector. Many applauded the streamlining of the Australia Council for the Arts grant processes, which set stringent word and support material limits and thereby cut down arduous and expensive arts bureaucracy. Further efficiencies could be made through more alignment between state and Federal government reporting requirements. A recurring concern in the interviews was the need for timely notification of grant outcomes. Respondents criticised state agencies, in particular, for late notification, which means artists and organisations do not have the necessary certainty to plan.

Respondents saw a collaborative approach between the sector and the funding agencies as the preferred option. They argued that the best results happen when the sector and the agencies work strategically and in partnership. They gave

examples of unproductive dynamics such as the agency acting as a faceless bureaucracy that largely interfaces with organisations through an annual cycle of data collection, or assuming an authoritative role and attempting to direct the sector rather than work in partnership with it.

At the time the research was undertaken, changes to the governance and funding decision processes at the Australia Council were of interest to many participants. Until July 2013, the Australia Council had boards and committees that administered arts funding across different artforms. Participants were aware that the Australia Council was moving to a more flexible model of peer-reviewed grant assessment. Some were apprehensive about this change, concerned that it could result in a reduction of specific knowledge about an artform. They were looking for assurance that the restructure would not mean an end to visual arts proposals being assessed by panelists with nuanced understanding of the contemporary visual arts. However, some looked on the changes as a positive development. Artists and organisations oriented towards multi-artform or interdisciplinary practice welcomed more fluidity across artforms and grant categories, which they believe is more aligned with current practice. Many hoped the changes to the Australia Council would signal an end to having to artificially divide cross-disciplinary projects to make them competitive.

Australia Council eligibility requirements for dedicated funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts were also discussed. At the time the research was undertaken, the Australia Council was reviewing an eligibility requirement that all applicants to Indigenous specific funding programs should provide a letter or certificate confirming their Indigenous identity from an Indigenous organisation, based on the principle that it is not the role of government agencies to determine Indigenous identity. This requirement was controversial among Indigenous interviewees. Many opposed the provision describing it as unnecessary and noting that some Indigenous artists would be disinclined to apply. Others described it as a vital safeguard ensuring that Indigenous specific funding would be targeted to Indigenous applicants.

In 2013, following consultation with Indigenous artists and communities, the Australia Council changed the confirmation of Indigenous identity eligibility requirement. Applicants to Indigenous specific funding programs are now asked to identify that they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals, groups and organisations at the time they make their funding application, and no longer need to provide confirmation.

New institutions and models for contemporary art

Contemporary art is dynamic and practitioners continually develop their own models and frameworks for new forms of practice. There needs to be flexibility in the sector to enable new practices to find support, but some respondents were not so sure that this is happening in Australia. Many representatives of younger organisations spoke of the difficulty – perhaps impossibility – of breaking through to a funding round that gives operational support and not just funding for a discrete project.

How to balance the needs of new forms of hybrid (and often non-institutional) practice against the existing and largely ‘bricks and mortar’ infrastructure was of interest to some respondents. The current visual arts infrastructure largely takes the museum as its model and is custom built to present objects in space. However, artists’ practices are

› Tintin Wulia

‘It’s exciting to see artists leading the sector but I think the infrastructure has not caught up with the changing nature of practice.’

Jeff Khan Co-Director, Performance Space

far broader than this. Artists who work with performance, sound, live art or participatory art, for instance, struggle to fit into the conventional infrastructure. Similarly, the increased activity around site-specific and socially engaged art projects has caused art to step right out of the institution and to become embedded within particular social contexts and spaces. As well as different presentation models, many of these practices demand new production frameworks. The traditional idea of the visual artist working solo in the studio is not applicable to these collaborative artists who may draw from theatre-making as much as contemporary art. New forms of production are being tested, often with a mix of processes from several disciplines, such as art, theatre and music. Many interdisciplinary artists spoke of difficulty trying to fit their projects into existing arts infrastructure.

Words such as ‘collaboration’, ‘network’ and ‘partnership’ figured highly in discussions. There is a fluidity across arts disciplines and a desire to test ideas and processes across artforms. There are increasing examples of cross-disciplinary practice, such as video artists working with dancers or sculptors with performers, and also of cross-institutional practice, such as dance companies collaborating with contemporary art spaces. This collaboration is valuable on pragmatic grounds as an opportunity to share resources and audiences, but it is also philosophically motivated. The boundaries have broken down across the arts, and the flattening of hierarchies and disciplines that started to gather speed last century has reached full acceleration. Many institutions and collectives are opening up to this collaborative ethos, seeking a permeable organisational interface and looking for partnerships with arts organisations, research institutions, universities, cultural groups and other traditionally unrelated disciplines and professions.

Many participants also hoped for more partnerships with the private sector. Whereas previously the idea of an artist collaborating with a company was sometimes seen as a bit dubious (‘Oh, you couldn’t do that in the past,’ one respondent said, ‘it would cheapen the work’), now it is seen as a fresh and exciting idea. A recent example is the MCA commissioning Nike Savvas to create an installation for the Louis Vuitton flagship store in Sydney. The rapid expansion of the creative and cultural industries, with new and nimble studios working in architecture, fashion, film, video games, architecture, software development and so on, has also ushered in new forms of cross-disciplinary collaboration across the public and private sectors. For instance, Aphids, an artist-led organisation located in Melbourne, worked with mobile development company Two Bulls to create an iPhone-based Global Positioning System (GPS) for a site-specific art project set in Point Nepean National Park.

Craig Walsh and Hiromi Tango

Respondents working in design often commented that arts funding and infrastructure are based on a traditional 'last century' idea of the artist that has trouble reconciling the new breed of creative practitioner coming out of today's design and craft communities. New kinds of creatives are emerging whose studios borrow methodologies from both industry and art practice. Some creative practitioners working at the (non-commercial) leading edge of design are deserving of funding and presentation opportunities, but many argued they currently occupy a blind spot in the infrastructure. Some respondents said that arts infrastructure is not experienced at supporting the hybrid production models of design practitioners and consequently opportunities are lost.

'It is interesting that most people that have the capacity to give to the arts at a low level just don't think to do it. Most still think 'that's what rich people do.'

Kay Campbell Executive Director, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

Private sector support

There has been determined growth in private sector support for the arts over the last decade. Large philanthropic donations are fuelling the creative ambitions of artists and art professionals. Recent examples include Simon and Catriona Mordant's $15 million contribution to the MCA redevelopment; the Ian Potter Foundation's $100,000 moving image commission; and David Walsh's $200 million towards the building of MONA. The philanthropist also often comes in the form of a collector. An example is John Kaldor's bequest to the AGNSW of his considerable collection of international and Australian contemporary art, accompanied by money from the Belgiorno-Nettis family to pay for the gallery. These gains in private sector support have been somewhat cooled by the global financial crisis, with organisations reporting that corporate sponsorship of the arts, in particular, has decreased.

Many celebrated the leadership shown by high-profile philanthropists, which is perceived to have encouraged a culture of giving over the past decade. Yet despite the increase in philanthropy, many participants said that Australians are not good givers. Australia is a rich nation

and many believe that Australians have greater capacity to give. They thought that the common understanding of the philanthropist as one who donates large amounts needs to be changed in order to encourage the next generation of wealthy young professionals to participate. Many also thought it time to mobilise those with a smaller capacity to give. Gifts of $100 or less can add up quickly. Some of this energy is being captured in new crowd-sourcing models, which offer opportunities for funding as well as mobilising grassroots support and building audiences. An example is the collective Field Theory, who crowd funded a series of four live artworks through 100 subscriptions of $100.

Respondents had a clear understanding of the role of legislative and tax frameworks as incentives or deterrents. Government matching programs, which match donations from private citizens dollar for dollar, are powerful incentives. Many supported a 125 percent tax incentive put forward in the *Myer Report.* They also believed rewards should be forthcoming for in-kind donations; there could be tax breaks for companies that donate space or for individuals who donate professional services for instance.

Arts organisations are working with increasingly lateral strategies for building earned income. Many institutions raise significant funds through venue hire, cafes, fee-based public programs and so on. However, this is being augmented by other sources, such as ‘creative consultancy’ (building programs that foster lateral arts thinking within business) or monetising artistic and curatorial intellectual property through new programs and technologies (such as pay-per-view video interviews).

Increased private support has stimulated the creation of contemporary art, as well as drawing individuals with diverse skills and a passion for art into the sector. However, the increased reliance on public-private funding models is also exposing the varied interests at play in these arrangements. The topic of private and public sector relations elicited conflicting opinions.

Some participants in the research believe that there is still unproductive reticence from parts of the arts sector to fully engage with the private sector in Australia. Others cited examples of where they felt that benefactor or private expectations had placed pressure on curatorial or artistic decisions. What garnered strong agreement from both the arts sector and philanthropists was the notion that private sector funding was not a replacement for government investment in arts and culture, but rather an augmentation.

Many artsworkers argued that the significant resources required to generate private sector support can impose hidden costs on organisations. Larger organisations can be better placed to manage this work, especially if they have dedicated staff members undertaking development. In small to medium organisations the workload to engage in fundraising is particularly challenging to manage. Participants were frustrated that already under-resourced gallery directors are required to be fundraising managers, and at the expense of their professional art skills. While organisations are under pressure to build their privately earned income, they rarely receive adequate support to do so.

Some of those interviewed also expressed concern about what they perceived as a growing privatization of the arts. This concern included the challenge in managing undue private influence over curatorial decisions and programming.

› Tristan Meecham

‘It’s hard but it is also the best job in the world. Even though there is not a lot of financial remuneration, I have rich life experiences that might not be possible in a more conventional career.’

Angelica Mesiti Artist

3. Being an artist

Art is hard but good

Tristan Meecham’s performance artwork (pictured) ponders the experience of being an artist and the challenges inherent in making art, not least the occasional bouts of artists’ block. Throughout the performance Meecham elucidates the message that ‘art is hard’. However, as a lively (if not motley) crew of fellow artists gather to support him onstage, Meecham concedes that, while art is hard, it is ‘hard, but good’. This abridged conclusion manifests the feeling that many artists have about their profession. Many participants agreed: art is hard, but good.

The good aspects include an ability to approach life and work with a high degree of personal and creative agency. Relative to other professions, artists retain control over how they spend their time and the tasks that comprise their ‘job’. Many feel rewarded by interesting days and rich life experiences, which may encompass overseas residencies and collaborations with diverse professions.

However, as Meecham concludes, being an artist is often hard. Ongoing concerns are an unpredictable career and income, with few achieving the career advancements or regular wages enjoyed in other professions. Tensions frequently prevail between artistic freedom and everyday realities such as rent and bills, and these tensions can intensify over time. Many participants voiced concerns about providing for a family, affording a mortgage, and supporting themselves in old age without adequate superannuation. Most artists find a second job to pay the bills or they develop multiple funding streams, such as a combination of artwork sales and commissions, teaching, art-related employment (perhaps installation assistance or conservation work), employment in other industries and grants from government or philanthropic sources.

› Julie Rrap

‘The new creative is not necessarily coming out of art school – that’s a big shift – and they are not comfortable, I believe, with the word ‘artist’ as a single definition of their practice.’

Steven Pozel Director, Object: Australian Design Centre

There is no prototype

The diverse trajectories of artists’ careers were an interesting aspect of the research. While there may be recurring tendencies, there are no clear vocational pathways. Artists navigate their practices in nuanced and individuated ways, essentially inventing their careers themselves. Suggesting a certain type of experience as a prototype for the artist is impossible in this complicated field of endeavour. Ways of creating art, presentation avenues, income levels, career expectations and friendship groups all vary radically depending on which artist you talk to.

Although this was probably always the case, it is especially so now. Over the course of the 20th century, the narratives of art history diversified and contemporary art is now an expanded field of possibilities. This has, in turn, multiplied the opportunities open to the artist. While the popular representation of the artist as a solo practitioner, usually a painter, labouring in the studio persists, this traditional definition is increasingly being reappraised. Collaborative practice is more common, as are models that borrow from industry or the performing arts.

Rather than use broad terms such as ‘artist’, ‘Australian artist’ or ‘emerging artist’, artists tend to describe themselves very specifically. For instance, as ‘an artist interested in hard-edged abstraction’ or ‘an artist engaged in live art participatory practices.’ A number of Indigenous artists also said that being an artist often held an additional dimension for them, which was described as an expectation to represent community as well as their individual artistic concerns.

Career pathways for artists

An issue that attracted a lot of comment was a perceived emphasis on career pathways for artists. Many cited a ‘stepping stone’ career pathway model that they felt had become increasingly dominant over the past decade, which suggests that an art school graduate begins as a young and emerging artist, moves through a mid-career stage on to established or late-career. Many artists, however, stated that their experience is far more complicated than this neat linear route suggests. Furthermore, there are broad sections of the contemporary art sector who do not adhere to this model. For example, artists who have never attended art school and Indigenous artists working in remote communities.

The participants were concerned that this stepping stone model presents new artists with unrealistic expectations. It implies that artists just need help to get started and will then experience enough buoyancy to be self-sustaining. However, when many highly esteemed senior Australian artists are unable to make a living from their art, it seems unlikely that the numerous emerging artists entering the contemporary art industry each year will survive on their art practice. Some

‘I think the only space where you can really try something that might not work is an artist-run space. They are spaces for risk-taking and experimentation, and they are relevant for both mid-career and established artists as well as emerging artists.’

James Newitt Artist

artists also resented this codifying of their profession on more philosophical grounds. They felt that it represented an attempt to ‘professionalise’ their careers. Escaping a conventional career was one of the advantages of being an artist, so to fall in line with convention would align them with a system that many want to resist.

The shift towards a careerist orientation in contemporary art was also felt to be manifesting as an increased emphasis on marketing and promotion. Many emerging artists were perceived to be in the grip of a persistent anxiety to bolster their resumes and promote their work, which can distract them from making artwork. Some artists were cynical about this and felt that the system is starting to privilege business acumen over high-quality studio work.

The professionalisation of the artist’s career is also evidenced by an increasing number undertaking advanced degrees. The last decade has seen the development of the PhD by Practice, where artists’ studio practice is recognised as a form of academic research. These PhDs are sometimes incentivised by a scholarship. Some artists who situate their work principally within an academic environment, continuing from undergraduate through to postgraduate studies, may gain little experience of external art markets and communities. Some art professionals were concerned about the disconnection between these postgraduate artists and the art industry, and thought that there are not sustainable career pathways for artists who are highly qualified academically but who have limited exhibiting or commercial experience. Others, however, applauded this new form of support for artists, which fuels research ambition and which can provide funding for art practices that may not be commercially viable.

Overemphasis of ‘young and emerging’

One of the most insistent messages in the research was that Australia is currently putting too much emphasis on, and perhaps too much investment in, the ‘young and emerging’ category. There was broad agreement that the first 5 to 10 years of an artist’s career is a challenging time when support is required. Participants also agreed that this is a dynamic demographic of the art sector, and certainly worthy of investment. Many young and emerging artists also stated that these grants had provided much needed financial support and a form of acknowledgment, which had fuelled their next steps. However, many argued that the plethora of grants for young and emerging practice should be reprioritised around investment in new ideas, which can come at any stage of an artist’s career, and not new artists.

Some participants also commented that it might be better to further invest in the development of existing initiatives rather than award so many stand-alone grants. Many artists spoke highly of their experiences in programs such as Next Wave Festival's KickStart or Gertrude Contemporary's Studio Artists' Program, and of the opportunities that can follow inclusion in exhibitions profiling emerging practice, such as the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art's *Hatched* or the MCA's *Primavera*. These initiatives represent real value to artists, offering genuine skills development, profile and network building, and a form of peer and industry endorsement. Representatives of some organisations were frustrated by the lack of funds for these programs despite their strong track records in delivering them and a perceived preponderance of funding for emerging artists. Furthermore, some felt that investing in the artist-run gallery system would benefit a great number of emerging artists. At present artists often hand over substantial portions of their grants to pay for exhibitions in artist-run galleries where the fee for hire model is the norm. Removing or lowering these fees could equate to more professionally supported exhibition opportunities for many artists.

The challenges of the mid-career (and beyond) artist

A burning issue in the sector is how to better support Australia's mid- to late-career artists. Some of Australia's most highly regarded artists, including some with celebrated international careers and extensive biographies, are unable to sustain a livelihood from their practice. This is not a new problem. The Australian contemporary art sector has never had the depth to support many of our most esteemed artists. As well as being unfortunate for the artists, it is also a loss for the nation.These artists have the capacity to develop highly sophisticated artworks.

Historically, artists faced with a mid-career lull often chose to relocate to other countries. Australia continues to have a large expatriate community of artists who have left seeking career advancement. While respondents celebrated this entrepreneurialism, many lamented this brain drain and hoped that in future residing in Australia would not mean limiting a career.

The participants noted that the glass ceiling is a common barrier for more established Australian artists. After a round of exhibitions in the medium- and large-scale tiers opportunities can dry up for a successful artist. Their options are to look overseas or return to working at a smaller scale in the artist-run galleries. Large-scale commissions and longer-term fellowships are excellent strategies for tackling this glass ceiling for talented artists. This more sustained investment fuels the intensity of artists' practice, produces ambitious content for audiences, and, arguably, increases opportunity for significant contributions to Australian art history. Notable examples of programs for commissions include ACCA's Helen Macpherson Smith series and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image's new Ian Potter Commission. Respondents also praised the emergence of new fellowships, such as the Sidney Myer Creative Fellowships and the Australia Council's Creative Australia Fellowships.

'I think that artists thrive on a sense of purpose and recognition. This could come in the form of a residency, commission, course, award or grant – by being given the trust and faith the artist is further propelled and compelled to work.'

Lily Hibberd Artist

‘The most successful artists have made incredibly innovative and bold decisions, and they are just as talented as the most successful businessmen, scientists or sportspeople but they are not often elevated with their peers.’

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor OBE Director, Museum of Contemporary Art

Money, space and acknowledgement

When asked about the most crucial support for artists, many respondents spoke of the importance of direct financial support. The system of grants is highly significant, and new philanthropic avenues and crowd funding opportunities are augmenting government funding in powerful ways.

The issue of artists’ fees was a thorny one. Everyone agreed that artists should be properly recompensed for their work and the respondents were frustrated with a system that primarily directs funding to organisations and administrators over individual artists. They did, however, recognise that the situation is complex. Different frustrations are experienced at different tiers. The larger institutions are felt to have more obligation to pay fair artist fees and there are higher expectations of leadership. Artists had more pragmatic expectations in the small to medium sector and saw them as under-resourced. Many artists said that they will forgo fees if it makes an exhibition or an accompanying catalogue possible.

Space was seen as a crucial requirement for an artist’s practice, and one with dwindling supply. Gaining access to a decent studio has become more and more difficult; subsidised studios are rare and low rents have all but evaporated in most cities. Reduced access to studios, and to well-equipped workshops, impacts how artists make their work, and some curators commented that this post-studio era is resulting in increasingly dematerialised practices. While good presentation opportunities are vital, so are spaces in which artists can congregate in peer groups. The respondents believed the capacity of shared studios and artist-run spaces to foster collegiate networks and enable critical conversations should not be overlooked.

An artist’s ability to continue their practice is connected to pragmatic factors (such as the ability to earn a living) as well as intangible forces (such as the confidence to continue). Most artists saw acknowledgement from the industry and peers as a necessary form of support. Such endorsement might come through awards, grants or residencies; invitations from curators into exhibitions or from art writers wanting to write about their work; or from fellow artists wishing to collaborate. Acknowledgement was regarded as a powerful enabler of artists. To this end, many participants called for more recognition of artists in the Australia Day Honours List, believing that overlooking Australia’s artists in these awards sends a negative message.

Warwick Thornton

› The Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere

‘The current state of contemporary visual art in Australia must be seen in an international context. In the last twenty years, contemporary art has become a global phenomenon.’

Rebecca Coates Independent curator, writer and lecturer

4. Australian art in the international context

Globalisation and shifting centres

‘Over the last 10 years, the huge, huge phenomenon has been globalisation.’ This statement from academic and artist Charles Green summed up many participants’ assessment of the key factor impacting contemporary art today. Globalisation was described as an inescapable paradigm and, therefore, how we participate in the international dialogue is critical. Some thought that our level of globalisation needs to be much more advanced, while others believed that we have strong histories and growing strengths in our international engagement. Nearly all agreed that we need to operate internationally. ‘I say we are doomed unless we get offshore,’ one person said with appropriate theatricality. However, the best strategies for how to engage internationally provoked much discussion and differing opinions.

Globalisation is unsettling the traditional art centres of the world. While places such as New York and London remain important, new areas of activity are opening up across the globe. This multiplicity of centres creates interesting opportunities for Australian contemporary art. The old hierarchies that previously structured world art markets are waning and there is now, as gallerist Anna Schwartz noted, ‘less discrimination on the basis of place’ and many new opportunities for ‘productive dialogues’. The general consensus was that organisations and artists should work in a more pluralistic way and engage in dialogues all over the world. This may mean, for instance, not only drawing connections between Melbourne and New York, but also making connections between places like Darwin and Jakarta, or Alice Springs and Kabul.

Many also hoped that these shifts in global currents might encourage more engagement between Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. Although there are many longstanding relationships, the respondents agreed that mainstream contemporary Australian art is primarily based on Eurocentric and North American frameworks. By not engaging deeply

‘National shows don’t work. To anybody in the international art world – whether curators, art museum directors, collectors or artists – national shows are repugnant.’

Professor Charles Green Artist and Reader in Contemporary International and Australian Art

with art practices in its own region, Australia is ignoring a great opportunity. Some respondents were critical of a perceived insular mindset that gives priority to presenting work in multiple Australian cities when, for similar investment, it could be shown in Australia and an Asian city. Participants were also watching Singapore with interest as it mounts a determined campaign to establish itself as the power base for contemporary art in the region. What, some wondered, is Australia’s response to this action? They recognised AsiaLink’s residency programs, organisations such as 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, and the Asia-Pacific Triennial (APT) as important precursors in a narrative that many hoped would gather momentum.

What is ‘Australian art’?

Engaging in international dialogues begs questions about how to articulate Australian contemporary art to a global audience. What, indeed, constitutes Australian art, and how do we position it within an international market? Australian art history has long been preoccupied with such debates, often expressed in negative terms relating to ‘the problem’ of geography or the so-called tyranny of distance. This was often accompanied by an anxiety around Australian art’s ‘peripheral status’. While these questions remain, the answers are undergoing an intriguing recalibration in response to changing local and global dynamics. A number of respondents referred to a term coined by academic Anthony Gardner, describing Australia as being in a ‘post-provincial but still peripheral’ phase.[5]

Exploring this notion in the preface to a compendium of his own writing about Australian art, academic Justin Clemens writes, ‘One of the first-rate things about living in a “second-rate” country is that you get to enjoy a lot of first-rate second-rate things.’ While Clemens’s tongue is lodged in his cheek, he is, nevertheless, making a serious point. He describes Australia as ‘a locale which is particularly propitious for contemporary art – and precisely because of its marginal status in a virtually globalised world. In other words, I not only don’t think that being in “a second-rate country” is a bad thing, I think it’s an excellent thing.’ Clemens here captures the growing confidence in Australia as an interesting place to work.[6]

In the interviews, there was no doubt about the quality and relevance of Australian contemporary art. Many were adamant that some Australian artists are working innovatively and ambitiously enough to be internationally successful. Participants paid little attention to the notion that, outside Indigenous practice, Australian art lacks a unique edge or world relevance. The history of British colonialism; the waves of immigration following the Second World War and the Vietnam War; the Asian Century; recent developments in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Middle East and Africa have all had an effect in Australia and all connect us to other parts of the world. Yet, many commented, often we do not make these connections forcefully enough. Participants were less concerned with ideas of ‘Australia’ and what might differentiate ‘Australian art’ and were more interested in the global narratives, artistic or political, that crisscross the globe irrespective of ideas around nationhood. Many believed it was time to proactively link Australian contemporary art to these narratives.

[5] Anthony Gardner, ‘Post-Provincial, Still Peripheral: Australian Art on the Global Stage, 1980-2009’, in Anderson, Jaynie (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.231-247 and pp.338-339.

[6] Justin Clemens, ‘Preface: First-Rate Second-Rate Art’ in *Minimal Domination* (Melbourne: Surplus, 2012): p9.

› Aphids

‘I think people working in the mainstream arts sector are increasingly curious about Indigenous art but also afraid or uncertain about how to interact with Indigenous art and the Indigenous art world.’

Julie Gough Artist

Participants thought lack of visibility is a reason for Australian artists’ failure to break into overseas markets. Tackling this means investing to overcome distance issues as well as addressing more perceptual issues, particularly by continuing to re-map our understanding of how Australian art connects to the international. Successive waves of immigration have continued to change the cultural and artistic profile of Australia. Twenty-seven percent of the population was born overseas, with the United Kingdom, New Zealand, China, India, Italy, Vietnam, the Philippines, South Africa, Malaysia and Germany in the top 10. Immigration from China, Nepal, India, the Sudan, Bangladesh and Pakistan is growing. Consequently what we call ‘Australian art’ connects with a rich array of artistic, political and cultural traditions from across the globe. Some respondents made the point that while Australian art is inherently world connected, the mainstream art industry is still relatively homogeneous, especially in the cultural profile of arts workers. Participants saw a need to further diversify mainstream contemporary art and to more forcefully explore the international networks already connected to our population.

Contemporary Indigenous art

Over the last few decades, contemporary Indigenous art has emerged as a potent force in Australian art, achieving great interest here and in international art markets. Many agreed that if you ask ‘What is Australian art?’ of an international audience, they will often reply, ‘Indigenous art’. (One artist quipped, ‘Maybe it’s better if non-Indigenous artists don’t know that!’)

While urban Indigenous artists are relatively visible within the mainstream art infrastructure, the rural and remote Indigenous art centres are largely a separate art industry. Broadly speaking, the Indigenous and non-Indigenous systems of contemporary art run parallel to each other, although there are examples of integration – such as the MCA’s mixed contemporary hang that incorporates John Mawurndjul and Juan Davila, and commercial gallery Roslyn Oxley9 representing Nyapanyapa Yunupingu as well as Hany Armanious. Participants saw further integration of these trajectories as one of the pressing tasks for Australian art. The opportunity to build critical and curatorial dialogues between Indigenous and non-Indigenous art was described as an exciting priority. Many different curators, writers, artists and arts workers across Indigenous and non-Indigenous fields of practice regarded this as an area of rich potential.

Nevertheless, some barriers will need to be overcome, not the least of which is the still widespread perception that Indigenous art made in art centres is 'traditional' and outside the rubric of contemporary art. A number of respondents argued that Indigenous art made now must be interpreted as a comment on Australian culture today and read alongside the artworks made by other contemporary artists. Furthermore, a number of Indigenous artists commented that some non-Indigenous art professionals are still hesitant to work with Indigenous artworks, inhibited by a perceived lack of knowledge or a fear that they will proceed incorrectly. Participants expressed a desire to address these stumbling blocks and identified the issue of how to bring together these art trajectories as an exciting question for Australian art.

No more 'Australian' projects

Many participants expressed relief that the practice of exporting projects branded as 'Australian art' is almost over. The idea of mounting a large Australian art project was seen as outmoded, especially when accompanied by cultural mascots in the form of a koala or a kangaroo. 'Being Australian' is not enough of a rationale for an exhibition. As Blair French, Executive Director of Artspace, said, 'For us, the crucial thing is that working internationally is not about sending out a pre-packaged show that screams or even whispers "Australia". It is about a more nuanced discursive engagement.'

Many participants agreed that contemporary art projects needed to have sophisticated artistic and curatorial foundations if they were to be effective in raising the profile of Australian art overseas. Victoria Lynn, Director of TarraWarra Museum of Art, said, 'In an ideal world I would like to see Australian curators invited by international museums to curate exhibitions that include artists from a range of countries. Two artists could be German, one could be French, one could be Indian, one could be Australian. However, it seems we haven't yet reached that level of dialogue.'

'Find curators from all over the world – they don't have to be from Europe, they could be from Mexico or South America or New Zealand.'

Roslyn Oxley Director, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

Respondents saw commercial markets as another area that would benefit from internationalisation. This means more international artists represented by Australian commercial galleries and more collectors buying international art from within Australia. These signifiers of international engagement are not as dominant in the Australian private gallery sector as in other countries, and the participants saw the reluctance of the local population to buy international work within Australia as a limitation.

International visitors' programs

The most effective strategy for internationalising Australian contemporary art involves building long-term, peer-to-peer relationships. Participants stressed the importance of playing the long game – building genuine links between people and places over time. In some contexts, notably some Asian countries, they saw strong relationships as a precursor to doing any business at all. The Australian art world is already crisscrossed with many deep international relationships and connections and the message was to honour these and build more.

Respondents regarded programs that bring curators, writers and other art professionals to Australia worthy of increased investment. While there are currently good programs, visits could be increased. They saw key events, such as the Biennale of Sydney, the Asia-Pacific Triennial and the Hong Kong Art Fair, as opportune times to host and attract guests. Participants criticised some invitations for not being strategic

› dOCUMENTA (13)

‘What now constitutes Australian contemporary art needs to be rethought. The fact that our borders and our identity are so porous is actually one of the strengths of Australian contemporary art.’

Josh Milani Director, Milani Gallery

enough: many argued that the relationships of contemporary art ‘insiders’ should be leveraged rather than having itineraries drawn up by government departments or embassies. They also thought it provident to think laterally about who might be, or might become, interesting rather than sending invitations to the ‘usual suspects’ (‘who are often too busy to come anyway’).

On the flip side of this equation, sending Australian art professionals overseas was also a priority for participants, and many argued for increased grants available to art professionals when curators and writers are vital to the positioning of contemporary art. Some interesting ideas were put forward, such as sending curators or writers overseas in connection with key international events. For example a curator could be embedded for a few months with Istanbul Biennial or an art writer with Hong Kong Art Fair, where they could research, share ideas about Australian artists, and build networks.

International studio programs

Many artists were very positive about the international studio residency program, however, many art professionals said it needs re-evaluation. Several residencies were criticised for no longer being strategically located or artistically relevant. Some argued for an entire overhaul of the system, saying that the dominant model in which artists are given ‘a key to a room’ for three months is outmoded, and that there would be better outcomes from immersing artists in peer groups and linked-in programs, such as those attached to art schools or institutions. The three-month model was also believed to be unrealistic in today’s time-poor society. It’s a rare person (or perhaps only a younger artist) who can afford time away from their personal and professional commitments. Many argued for a more flexible model. Some interviewees cautioned against signing long-term leases that tie funds up, preferring bespoke residency options that are responsive to changing circumstances and which foster relationships between specific artists and organisations. While the Australia Council currently manages the process for international studios, the participants thought that giving international partners more of a role in selection would be an easy and cost-free way of encouraging familiarity with Australian artists.

The respondents saw international studios operating in Australia, such as those at Artspace or Gertrude Contemporary, as crucial infrastructure for hosting international guests. They believed small to medium organisations are highly effective at building strong and reciprocal networks, and boosting or expanding these programs could increase dividends.

‘In the past, our artists’ ambition was to have museum shows in Australia and to sell to Australian collectors. Today their ambition is global. Their work is shown at international art fairs and in museums around the world. Recently Tracey Moffatt had a show at the Museum of Modern Art, which is wonderful.’

John Kaldor AM Director, Kaldor Public Art Projects

Big events

Over the past few decades, the rhythm of the art world has been structured around high-profile international art events that have continued to grow in number, scale and intensity. Biennales like Venice Biennale, Istanbul Biennial and the Biennale of Sydney; events such as the Asia-Pacific Triennial and dOCUMENTA; and art fairs such as Art Basel, Frieze Art Fair and Hong Kong Art Fair are important instances of international critical mass. They are valuable opportunities for Australian art, however choosing which to engage in and how to engage are perplexing questions.

Most of those interviewed saw Venice Biennale as the most significant international event (as one said, ‘you just have to be there’), although a few thought it overstated and believe that it unfairly monopolises resources. A recurring sentiment was that it should be delivered in a more curatorially nuanced manner (‘more about art, less concerned with marketing’). Many agreed on the importance of biennales and triennials, and celebrated the fact that dOCUMENTA (13) included eight Australian artists. This is connected to Artistic Director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev’s familiarity with Australian artists developed through her directorship of the 2008 Biennale of Sydney. The art fair was also positioned as a crucial event, not only for stimulating markets but for critical engagement and international networking. Opinion was divided on which art fairs are important. Some doubted that all are productive but they are navigated differently by each gallery.

Exhibition programs

Over the period of the interviews, Anish Kapoor and Candice Breitz opened major exhibitions in Australia, and Patricia Piccinini and Shaun Gladwell opened major exhibitions in the United Kingdom. Participants referred to this as symbolic of an exciting international cross-trade in contemporary art projects. Many were thrilled at the growing frequency and ambition of international art projects both onshore and off. A number of curators expressed frustration about barriers to funding for international artists. Export has historically been prioritised over import, but both are believed to be vital.

A few respondents argued that the Australia Council should operate more forcefully offshore in a way that could focus opportunities for Australian artists. Organisations cited as worthy of emulation were the Goethe-Institut and the Swiss Institute in New York, which was applauded for its internationally mixed curatorial program. Others baulked at the idea of increasing operational overheads and administrative intervention: ‘It’s a bad idea. We don’t need another bureaucracy. Just let the experts do it.’

› Michaela Gleave

‘Contemporary art was a very small club 30 to 40 years ago. Today, contemporary art is fashion. Contemporary artists are now rock stars. Take someone like Damien Hirst – he is a brand.’

John Kaldor AM Director, Kaldor Public Art Projects

5. Engaging with contemporary art

The ‘spectacularisation’ of art

In 2007, contemporary art megastar Damien Hirst exhibited a new work *For the love of God*, a human skull fabricated from platinum and embellished with 8,601 diamonds. The work was accompanied by a sale price of £50 million. Artworks with such ‘wow factor’ have a shock and delight effect that is increasingly popular in global contemporary art. There is a growing desire for art that delivers visual fireworks and jaw-dropping experiences and which attracts large crowds (and needs serious financing).

Some call it the ‘Saatchi effect’. Art flamboyantly pursuing the sensational and heavily backed by marketing has now hit full stride. Where contemporary art was once confined to a small and relatively unobtrusive corner of society, it is now embedded in the slipstream of popular culture. These are recent examples: Ai Weiwei going Gangnam style on YouTube followed by Anish Kapoor going Gangnam style in support of Ai Weiwei; David Bowie releasing his first song in 10 years with a video by Tony Oursler; and Marina Abramović developing a work with Hollywood actor James Franco.

While Australia may not have equally pyrotechnic examples, the shift towards the spectacular in contemporary art is nevertheless evident here. For instance, spectacle architecture has emerged as a home for contemporary art. This international trend found its high church in Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, but Australia has its own lineage, which seems to grow by the year. The reconfiguring of ACCA in 2002 from a relatively modest cottage to an architectural wonder signalled the start of a local trend. More recent iterations have included the $53 million MCA redevelopment, including the Loti Smorgon Sculpture Terrace with harbour views (2012); MONA, a $200 million architectural vision fit to rival Bilbao, set into the wall of a cliff (2011); and the Design Hub at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), a stylish $80 million building dedicated to housing people and projects that push the frontier of design innovation (2012). The experience of visiting these buildings is almost as significant as the artwork housed within, ‘which is lucky,’ one curator

› **Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney**

said drily, 'because there is no money left for the art.' Substantial budgets were amassed to fund these major capital works, however achieving funding to enable the ongoing programming of these beautiful (and cavernous) spaces can sometimes be challenging for these institutions. This was an issue commented on by a number of arts administrators.

Blockbuster appeal

The drive towards the spectacular in visual art operates most in the large-scale tier of the sector. It is evident also in the rise of the blockbuster exhibition. The trend of the big touring show began in the 1970s and has become a key outcome for large institutions, often with funding from state tourism agencies. Where once the museum's permanent collection was paramount, there is an increasing focus on temporary exhibitions, events and activities. This represents a shift from the museum as repository of art towards an understanding of it as a social hub. In 1968, when the NGV opened in St Kilda Road, the foyer was devoid of art and configured to feel like a motel, with the rationale that Australians were comfortable in motels but still timid about art galleries. This is no longer the case. Large museums are popular spaces, places not only to see art but to participate in fun art bars or dedicated kids' spaces.

'The contemporary art audience is still largely a white middle-class audience that I don't think truly reflects the cultural diversity that actually exists in Australia.'

Amy Barrett-Lennard Director, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art

A range of blockbuster projects have been delivered across Australia, often as part of state government cultural tourism initiatives. For instance, the Victorian government initiated funding for the *Melbourne Winter Masterpieces* series in 2004, aiming to attract national and international visitors in order to generate an economic outcome for the state. Most of the Melbourne Winter Masterpieces series have had an historical orientation, with historical movements such as the Impressionists believed to be better bets to attract big audiences than contemporary art. However contemporary projects have also featured such as the Australian Centre for the Moving Image's (ACMI) *Tim Burton: The Exhibition* (2010) and *Game Masters* (2012). The Sydney International Art Series, inaugurated in 2010-11, is a similar cultural tourism initiative across the summer months, which presented *Anish Kapoor* at the MCA and *Francis Bacon: Five Decades* at the AGNSW in 2012-2013. A number of participants commented on the exciting emphasis placed on contemporary art at Brisbane's Queensland Art Gallery I Gallery of Modern Art (QAG I GOMA) over the last few years, not least of all its *Contemporary Australia* triennial exhibitions of contemporary Australian Art, the biennial Premier of Queensland's National New Media Art Award inaugurated in 2008 and the Asia-Pacific Triennial. These were celebrated as high profile blockbuster-style examples of contemporary art exhibitions.

Participants celebrated blockbuster exhibitions for generating wide appeal but also for their ability to enable artists to work at a large scale or to present in-depth surveys of work. However some with experience in large-scale institutions also described the difficulties of working in an environment in which artistic programming is tied to tourism. The pressure to deliver large audiences puts the onus on organisations to stage exhibitions with a wow factor to lure people through the doors, and also into the state where they will spend additional tourist dollars. Some curators described the difficulty of

‘I think audience engagement is about real engagement, not just quantifying numbers. Five people who engage really deeply with the work is a more meaningful result than 120 who come to see a spectacle and leave.’

James Newitt Artist

working to an equation that privileges ticket sales over artistic experimentation. Another side effect of this cultural tourism imperative is that institutions are encouraged to work on an exclusivity basis. In the past, large exhibitions travelled around Australia, giving diverse audiences the opportunity to see important works and enabling organisations to share costs and spread risks. Some respondents commented that the cultural tourism imperative implicitly sets states up to work in competition with one another, trying to draw audiences to their state over another.

The need for diverse models for engaging with contemporary art

The blockbuster exhibition and the spectacular artwork have become high profile examples of the contemporary art experience. However, many contemporary art insiders felt it crucial to advocate for the less sensational forms of contemporary art. Some aspects of contemporary art are less bombastic or more difficult. Artists making process-based artworks or challenging feminist video works, for instance, will require a different kind of engagement, and may have smaller audiences. Many were adamant that a full range of contemporary art practices be supported. The divergent forms of contemporary art are important for driving developments forward. Some works also hold importance as channels for cultural critique. The more difficult or less sensational projects must also be supported and some participants expressed a concern that spectacle or blockbuster art is becoming the dominant mode of the art experience in the popular imagination.

How audiences engage with contemporary art was a topic of interest throughout the interviews. Participants agreed the spectrum of possibilities should all be accommodated, from deep, slow reflection over multiple viewings to a quick walk-through over a lunch break. However, many felt that the balance has swung too far towards popular appeal. Many thought that ‘public-ness’ is overemphasised, manifesting as pressure to continually build audiences and increase visibility (through media coverage, online hits, Facebook likes and so forth). Many argued that there is a ‘bums on seats’ ethos,

which rewards attendance at the expense of other criteria. Furthermore, contemporary artworks exploring difficult or unorthodox ideas or practices will not always appeal to a broad audience, and participants were concerned that their message might be diluted if they sought to.

Respondents wanted a nuanced approach to judging success, which includes different ways of engaging with art and sets an art organisation's priorities in line with an appropriately variegated sector. Some institutions are well placed to raise the profile of contemporary art and to achieve large audiences; others need to support artists or niche audiences who are interested in difficult practices.

Attracting audiences

The audience for contemporary art has increased over the past decade, with future growth forecast. While the first point of contact may be flagship institutions, a feeder system or trickle-down effect is often operating, encouraging further interest in, for example, contemporary art spaces and artist-run galleries.

While some respondents maintained art (particularly contemporary art) does not register in the national psyche in a significant way (compared to sport, for instance), most believed that Australians are very engaged with art and cultural events. They were fatigued by the art versus sport debate in Australia and thought there was room for both.

Strategies are important to encourage audiences. Participants saw free entry as crucial; as one said, 'It's not like selling Picasso – people don't know what contemporary art is.' Friendly visitor services officers in large institutions are also important: 'No attitude allowed – we must make people feel welcome.' Many bemoaned their inadequate or non-existent marketing budgets: 'We can't compete with the rugby, the latest Hollywood movie – or Francis Bacon.' They believed a good strategy is to build recognition through repeat programming. Gertrude Contemporary's annual *Octopus* series and ACCA's *NEW* now hold spots in the calendar and the public's minds.

'We should be the frontier. We should be difficult and unpopular. And that is why we have credibility locally, nationally and internationally as a generator of robust contemporary art practice.'

Alexie Glass Director/Senior Curator, Gertrude Contemporary

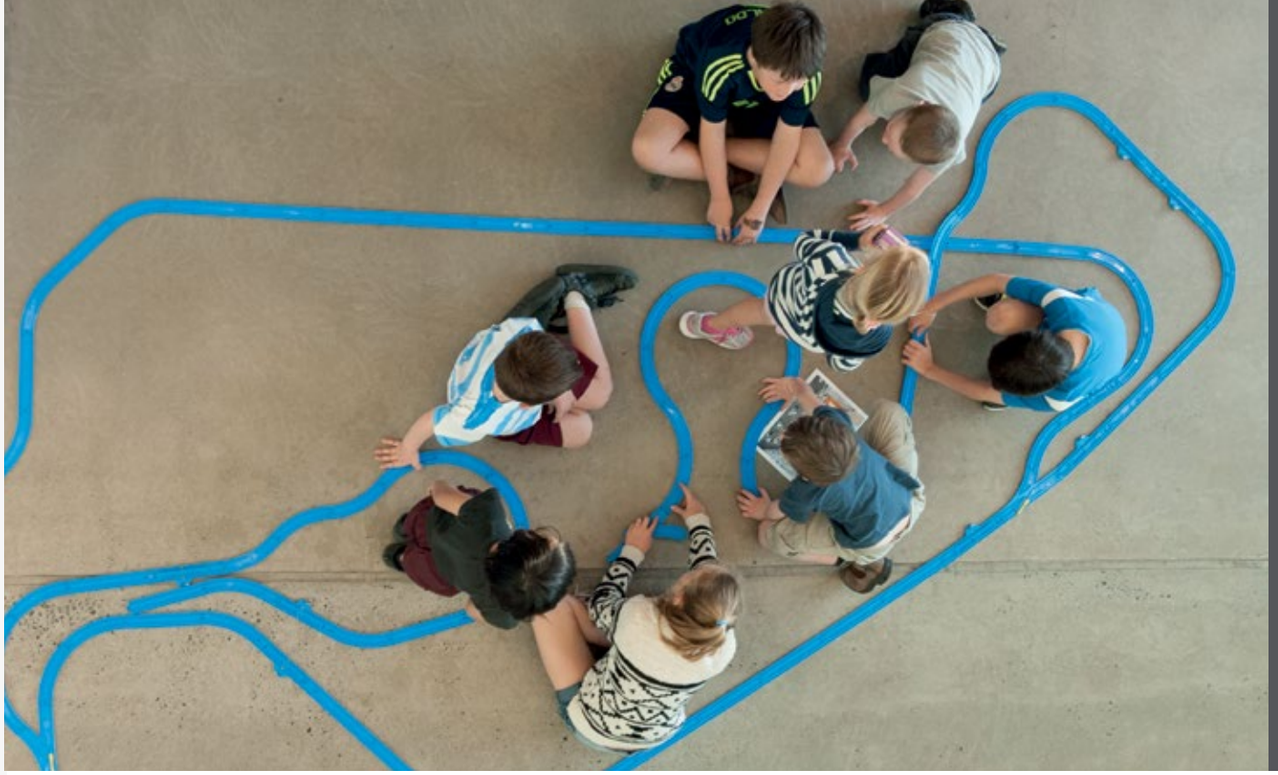
There is a fever for festivals and special events in Australia. Audiences queued all night for the NGV's *Salvador Dalí: Liquid Desire* 24-hour Dalí event (2009), for instance, and White Night (2013), a dusk-to-dawn festival across multiple institutions in Melbourne, attracted more than 300,000 people. Participants saw these events as spruiking contemporary art and building familiarity with institutions. In a similar way, the Biennale of Sydney describes Cockatoo Island as a 'converter venue'. Interest is piqued by the idea of a ferry trip to the island, and then audiences are often inspired to visit the MCA.

Bringing art out of the gallery into different contexts is generating new audiences. Artists working site-specifically or in socially engaged practices build rapport with diverse audiences, including those who have never set foot inside a gallery. Offsite and outreach projects can also provide platforms for art to work in a more socially engaged way and to deliver community outcomes.

Advocating for contemporary art

A significant number of interviewees felt that the contemporary art sector is an inadequate advocate for its own interests. This included advocacy to government. Some participants cited static funding over the last few years as evidence of undernourishment of contemporary art in the national budget. Many argued that there was strong qualitative and quantitative data to support the case for contemporary art, and that the failure was in advocating up the line to government.

This criticism of advocacy extended to the public domain. The most often cited instance of leadership failure was the



‘There are certain international museums and galleries that I take a strong interest in due to their online profile – I know their programs and I find them really engaging – but in many cases I haven’t even been through their door.’

Max Delany Senior Curator, Contemporary Art, National Gallery of Victoria

political furore that erupted in 2008 over Bill Henson’s use of a naked teenage model. This became a high profile stoush that played out across the front pages of newspapers and involved senior public figures lambasting Henson’s work, not least of all then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd who denounced it as ‘revolting’ and of little artistic merit. Many participants in the interviews criticised a perceived lack of support for Henson from the contemporary arts sector, which was incommensurate with his standing as one of Australia’s most highly respected and recognised artists. Many felt that informed commentary by contemporary art professionals was missing from the debates, and that individuals and organisations in leadership positions should have made an argument for the artistic merit of Henson’s work more forcefully. They felt that Henson’s work remained largely undefended and contemporary art was forced into a defensive position. The subsequent development of the Working with Children protocol by the Australia Council was nominated by some participants as further entrenchment of this failure to advocate for artists.

Many commented that there were existing regulations to protect children, and that the primary impact of this protocol is to limit artistic freedom. It was also interpreted as a further sign of public distrust of artists’ motivations.

Building critical engagement

Where once there was a perception that art in the broader Australian community needed to be championed, now audiences and art professionals are looking for more sophisticated, niche engagement. Many writers and curators also perceived a ‘return to history’ and a reinvigoration of historical consciousness where artists and audiences are more aware of artistic precursors.

Participants saw building critical engagement as a priority, and a number of strategies rated highly. The most urgent was a call for increased art writing and publishing. Many felt that more resources need to be devoted to the development of high-quality publishing outcomes (both in print and online)

› Kids workshop at APT7

‘I’ve never considered the possibility of doing anything else. Making art equates to a fulfilling and mentally stimulating existence and I’d be unhappy if I didn’t do it.’

Jess Johnson Artist

and encouraging excellent art writing. There were differing opinions about supporting art journals. Some thought that they are not sustainable in Australia and that, rather than investing to keep them afloat, it is better to work with digital publishing opportunities. Others thought that journals are crucial in documenting Australian art practice and called for continued support. Supporting the art writer is worthy of further investment. Many commented on the importance of increasing the range of voices and enabling the mobility of art writers, both nationally and internationally. Some participants mentioned the ‘erasure of history’ where arts projects in some states pass unnoticed by the Australian arts media, which primarily operates out of the eastern states. The recent move to enable writers increased access to international studios was regarded as a good strategy. Roving art writers, like roving curators, can be powerful agents for contemporary art.

Coverage of contemporary art in the mainstream media polarised opinion: some thought that it is either ignored or unfairly derided, while others disputed this, believing that contemporary art is well profiled. Although the authority of the newspaper art critic has waned, some thought they still have the capacity to influence perceptions of contemporary art within the broader community. Some expressed concern at some critics’ perceived dismissal of contemporary art. Overall, participants wanted more dialogue. Developments such as the internet and social media, which enable growing coverage and lively exchanges, were regarded with much interest.

Participants saw the formal education system and public access programs as highly important but relatively untapped opportunities to increase audiences and deepen engagement. Resourcing is problematic and more investment would pay significant dividends in building a groundswell for art over the long term. Education was nominated by many for its great capacity to build potentially profound connections between audiences and artworks.

New technologies and digital infrastructure also offer new opportunities. Many artists and institutions are working creatively and ambitiously with these new communication channels. Different technologies are enabling unprecedented access to art, with some arguing that an institution’s online space is becoming as important as its physical space. New ways of making and engaging with contemporary visual art are afforded by developments in digital technology, from the rapid uptake of mobile devices, to increasing connectivity and digital literacy, and the convergence and connection between creator and audience. This digital capacity will only increase when the National Broadband Network is rolled out and initiatives such as Google’s Project Glass are launched.

› Angelica Mesiti

› Patrick Miller

Appendices

Appendix 1

‘This report is not a complete analysis of contemporary Australian art but rather a multi-dimensional insight into the current state of the sector.’

Methodology

This report is a qualitative profile of the contemporary visual arts sector based on extensive interviews with sector stakeholders. This report is not a complete analysis of contemporary Australian art but rather a multi-dimensional insight into the current state of the sector.

Over a three-month period, 72 people participated in face-to-face interviews and 21 contributed text-based submissions in response to a discussion guide developed in consultation with the Australia Council to prompt thinking about broad aspects of the contemporary visual arts. The list of face-to-face interview subjects was compiled in consultation with the Australia Council, and by circulating a text version of the discussion guide we hoped to open the research process up to other contributors.

Stakeholders with diverse experience across Australian contemporary art were interviewed including artists, curators, directors, philanthropists, collectors, commercial gallerists, art centre mangers, academics and writers. The participants came from different parts of Australia, were at different stages of their careers, and were engaged with myriad contemporary art practices. Many interview subjects have had, or currently have, multiple points of engagement with the sector, which gives them a multi-dimensional understanding of the sector.

For the purposes of this report ‘contemporary visual arts’ is an umbrella term for a broad range of artistic practices including live and performance art, media art, sound art, painting, sculpture, printmaking, photography, craft and object design, and installation art. This includes innovative contemporary practice by living Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists.

A full list of contributors is included in this report. We would like to express our whole-hearted thanks to those who gave their time and ideas so freely. It was a great privilege to undertake this research and we were greatly encouraged by people’s generosity, especially so in the end of year rush.

The final report features quotes from participants. It was important that people were confident to speak freely and so all participants had the option of anonymity.

The views outlined in this report are not necessarily those of the Australia Council for the Arts unless expressly stated.

Appendix 2

List of interview participants[7]

Face-to-Face Interviews

Aaron Seeto
Director, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art

Adrian Gebers
Artist and Co-Director, Peloton

Alan Cruickshank
Executive Director, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia and Editor, *Contemporary Visual Arts and Culture Broadsheet*

Alex Gawronski
Artist and Co-Director, Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown (I.C.A.N.)

Alexie Glass
Director/Senior Curator, Gertrude Contemporary

Amanda Love
Director, LoveArt

Amy Barrett-Lennard
Director, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art

Andrew Varano
Artist and Co-Director, OK Gallery

Angelica Mesiti
Artist and member of The Kingpins

Anna Schwartz
Director, Anna Schwartz Gallery

Avril Quaill
Artistic Director, Cairns Indigenous Art Fair

Bec Dean
Co-Director, Performance Space

Blair French
Executive Director, Artspace

Brian Parkes
Chief Executive Officer, JamFactory

Channon Goodwin
Artist and Gallery Manager, BUS Projects

Charles Green (Professor)
Artist and Reader in Contemporary International and Australian Art, The University of Melbourne

Charlie Sofo
Artist and member, Artery Cooperative

Christine Morrow
Director, Australian Experimental Art Foundation

Christopher L G Hill
Artist and Co-Director of Y3K

Christian Thompson
Artist

Daniel Palmer (Dr)
Senior Lecturer, Theory of Art & Design, Monash University

Danny Lacy
Director, West Space

David O'Connor
Exhibitions & Public Programs Manager, Art Gallery of South Australia

Edwina Circuitt
Manager, Warakurna Artists

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor OBE
Director, Museum of Contemporary Art

Frances Barrett
Artist and member, Brown Council

Geoff Newton
Artist and Director, Neon Parc

[7] We have used the roles and titles of participants at the time of the interviews. Some participants have since changed positions.

Guy Ben-Ary
Artist and Artist-in-residence, SymbioticA

Helen Johnson
Artist

Hetti Perkins
curator and (former) Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, Art Gallery of New South Wales

James Newitt (Dr)
Artist and Samstag Scholar

Jared Davis
Program Manager, Experimenta and Co-Director, BUS Projects

Jasmin Stephens
Curator

Jason Maling
Artist and member, Field Theory

Jeff Khan
Co-Director, Performance Space

Jenny Watson
Artist

John Kaldor AM
Director, Kaldor Public Art Projects

Josh Milani
Director, Milani Gallery

Judy Watson
Artist

Juliana Engberg
Artistic Director, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art and Artistic Director, 19th Biennale of Sydney

Julie Gough (Dr)
Artist and Honorary Associate, School of Art, University of Tasmania

Justin Clemens (Dr)
Senior Lecturer, English, The University of Melbourne

Kay Campbell
Executive Director, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

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Chair, The Melbourne Art Foundation and Director, Fehily Foundation

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Executive Director, Transfield Holdings and Chair, Board of Directors, Biennale of Sydney and founder, newDemocracy Foundation

Marah Braye
Chief Executive Officer, Biennale of Sydney

Marco Marcon
Director, IASKA

Mark Feary
Curator, Artspace

Mark Hughes
Director, Mark Hughes Art Advisory

Max Delany
Senior Curator, Contemporary Art, National Gallery of Victoria

Megan Cope
Artist and member, proppaNOW

Michael Edwards
Director, Contemporary Art Spaces Tasmania

Michaela Gleave
Artist

Naomi Cass Director
Centre for Contemporary Photography

Neil Balnaves AO
Founder, The Balnaves Foundation

Nick Mitzevich
Director, Art Gallery of South Australia

Nicole Durling
Senior Curator, Museum of Old and New Art

Raafat Ishak
Artist and member, Ocular Lab

Rebecca Coates
Independent curator, writer and lecturer

Reuben Keehan
Curator, Contemporary Asian Art, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

Ricky Maynard
Artist

Roslyn Oxley
Director, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

Rowan McNaught
Artist

Sarah Bond
Visual Arts Director, Asialink

Sean Cordeiro
Artist

Simon Maidment
Director Satellite Art Projects

Steve Pozel
Director, Object Gallery

Tamara Winikoff
Executive Director, National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA)

Victoria Lynn
Director, TarraWarra Museum of Art

Tim Acker
Principal Research Leader, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Economies Project, CRC-REP

Vikki McInnes
Co-director, Sarah Scout Presents and Director, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts

Zara Stanhope
Principal Curator, Auckland Art Gallery and Chair, *un Magazine*

Text-based Interviews

Amita Kirpalani
Assistant Curator, Australian Centre for the Moving Image

Ashley Crawford
Independent arts writer

Din Heagney
Writer

Elvis Richardson
Artist and Co-Director, DEATH BE KIND

Frances Plagne
Artist and writer and musician

Jarrod Rawlins
Co-director, KALIMANRAWLINS

Jess Johnson
Artist and founder, Hell Gallery

Kirsten Paisley
Director, Shepparton Art Museum

Lily Hibberd
Artist

Michael Rolfe
Chief Executive Officer, Museums & Galleries NSW

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Nick Croggon
Co-editor, Discipline

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Randi Linnegar
National President, Australian Commercial Galleries Association

Robert Nelson
Art critic, The Age

Sanné Mestrom
Artist

Sarah Tutton
Director, Australian Centre for the Moving Image

Scott Mitchell
Artist and member, Artery Cooperative

Ulanda Blair
Curator, Australian Centre for the Moving Image

Vivien Allimonos
Head of Public Affairs, Australian High Commission, London

Image credits

2. Simryn Gill
Naught (detail), 2012
Collected objects, Variable dimensions Courtesy Tracy Williams Ltd, New York
Image: Jenni Carter

8. Emily Ferretti
Emily Ferretti working in her studio at Gertrude Contemporary, 2012
Image: Jake Walker

9. Installation view
Melrose Wing of European Art, 2013 Art Gallery of South Australia (feat. Berlinde de Bruyckere, We are all flesh)

12. Sean Gladwell
Stereo Sequences, 2011
Image: ACMI & Christian Capurro Courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery

15. Tjarlirli Art
Including Nora Holland, Trudy Smythe, Eunice Porter, Mary Gibson, Faith Butler, Nancy Jackson and Nyarapayi Giles.
Seven sisters collaboration
Image: Edwina Circuitt and Warakurna Artists.

16. Jess Johnson
For Protection Against the Modern World, 2012
Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne

18. Guy Ben-Ary
Silent Barrage, 2009
Image: Phil Gamblen

19. Masahiro Asaka
Surge, 2012
Cast glass, cold worked
Image: Rob Little

21. Tintin Wulia
Terra Incognita, et cetera, 2009
Watercolour mural
Image: Sharjah Art Foundation

22. Craig Walsh and Hiromi Tango
Traces Blue, 2013
Detail of works installed as part of the Setouchi Triennale
Image: courtesy of the artists

24. 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art
Image: 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian art

25. Tristan Meecham
Hard But Good, 2012
Arts House, Melbourne
Image: Ponch Hawkes

26. Julie Rrap
Studio working shot
'Loaded', 2012
Image: Artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

27. Lauren Brincat
This Time Tomorrow Tempelhof, 2011
Single-channel High Definition video production still
Image: Lauren Brincat and Anna Schwartz Gallery

30. Warwick Thornton
Home and Away: Mother Courage's Van, 2012
Film still.
Image: Sam Wilde and Warwick Thornton

31. Nathan Beard, Abdul Abdullah, Casey Ayres (left to right)
The Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, 2012
Image: Pia Johnson

33. Aphids
Computer Boy, 2012
Carriageworks, Sydney
Image: Heidrun Löhr

35. Australian artists at Documenta 2012
Artists: Gordon Bennett, Margaret Preston, Stuart Ringholt,
Courtesy der Künstler; Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Image: Anders Sune Berg

37. Michaela Gleave
Our Frozen Moment, 2012
Image: Silversalt, the artist and Anna Pappas Gallery

38. Museum of Contemporary Art Australia
Image: Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and Brett Boardman Photography

40. Daniel Mudie Cunningham
Unstuck, 2013
Image: Courtesy the artist

42. Kids Workshop
Paramodel, Paramodel joint factory children's workshop activity, 2012
Commissioned for Kids' APT7 with support from the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation
Image: Mark Sherwood.

44. Angelica Mesiti
Citizens' Band, 2012
Image: Artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery

45. Patrick Miller
Tribute Night, 2012
Installation view
Courtesy of OK Gallery

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